

Like A Boy at 50 Bubbling Over With Vitality

Written by Hereward Carrington.

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Dramatized by Charles W. Goddard.

Synopsis of Previous Chapters.

Myra Maynard, a beautiful heiress, is pursued by a band of black magicians. Their goal is to steal the life of the girl, a former member of the Black Order, may come to them before her arrival at her home, according to her secret will.

Dr. Payson Alden, a brilliant young physician, who has devoted years to the study of the psychic, learns of their operations. He decides to investigate the matter by the daring doctor. His efforts are made especially difficult by the secret surveillance of the Black Order of Arthur Varney, a wealthy clubman, who is desperately in love with Myra, but held in fear to the commands of the high priest, by hypnotism the girl is commanded to all her efforts in the secret laboratory which her father has built in their house; she walks in her sleep to obey this, but is rescued by Alden. Under the instruction of the physician, Myra learns to project her astral or spiritual body, and during one of these psychic excursions the members of the order toll in their evil mysteries to bring her death by severing the astral cord so that the soul cannot return. The prayers of Myra's mother and the doctor, however, succeed in pulling the astral flower is sent to the girl by Varney, but Alden's intervention saves her from their hands.

While endeavoring to track down the criminal, Alden is forced to flee from the house, and returns to his home to find that at the suggestion of Varney Myra now used the doctor's name to induce him to send out her astral in search of him. The arch criminal substitutes his own soul for that of the girl, and in Myra's body endeavors to slay her benefactor. With subtle twists and turns, however, but Alden already forces the substitution and escapes with the girl from a new form of destruction.

Finally the devil worshipers make a supreme effort, sending the astral of Arthur Varney to the girl's room at night, where the body is materialized according to the methods of black magic. Varney's soul is in the gas, but the doctor saves her once more. Dr. Alden then sets a trap in her bedroom, and the doctor, placing ultra-violet ray electric lamps about the room.

A second attempt is made by the same method, no less a person than the high master materializing. The astral electric lights, controlled by the doctor, are striven to slay the girl, decompose the astral materialization, and bring to the confident that he has slain the arch enemy at last.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Death Sentence.

THE Master of the Black Order lay back, breathing heavily, his limbs twisting in an occasional paroxysm of pain. The black velvet curtains, close by the easy chair in which he reclined, seemed surcharged with the writhing of some restless spirit. Arthur Varney leaned forward studying the face of the leader with anxiety.

"Do you feel completely recovered, master?" he asked. "I thought you were dead last night. We worked over you for two hours or more."

The other's voice was husky, as he responded.

"Yes! My astral went through the most terrible suffering. The body was nearly destroyed by the ultra-violet. How could that accursed have learned about its power? And how could the trap have been set for me so? Who gave the warning that I was going there myself?"

Varney shook his head. The master fixed his basilisk eyes upon the dark ones of the clubman.

"Varney, I have more than once felt that there was a traitor in the group. You know what happened to that Hindoo? Well, that was only the bare suggestion of what I know how to do in the line of punishment. Beware of treachery, Varney!"

The other man's voice shook as he extended a pleading hand.

"Oh, master! I have been faithful unto death. I have sacrificed my every impulse to obey your mandates."

"Yes," snarled the other, twisting as though in renewed agony. "And you know the reason why you have been afraid to break your oath of fealty."

"You will not betray me?"

"No, as long as you remain faithful. But I know well that your love for Myra Maynard has made you hesitate several times when success was within your grasp. Remember, the reward I have promised you will only be paid if you earn it."

The master was silent for a few moments, lost in thought. At last he spoke.

"I am still suffering from the astral pain, due to the drag of the soul, from those accursed lights. But now I know the instrument of our complete vengeance," and the master reached to the left, crashing a brazen sun upon the Oriental song which swung close at hand.

The master of ceremonies of the Black Order entered with a slow salutation. "Has the trial begun?" demanded the master.

"Yes, even as the master has commanded."

"Let me have the listening tube," demanded the ruler of the Black Order. A percha tube was handed to his stiffened grasp, and he listened with a cruel smile on his face.

The other extremity of the connection a tragic scene, similar in some ways to other gatherings of that mysterious group of evidences—was being enacted. Yet there was a difference in the robed figures with hooded heads which evidenced the change which had come over the self-confident members of the Black Order.

Within the past few days they had realized that their leader was not infallible. The grin of law and order had been closing in on them, driving them from the ancient meeting place to these new quarters. The hitherto indomitable master was, they knew, even suffering from his own adventure, after two abrupt failures.

So it was that the spirit of suspicion burned in the breast of every member against every fellow. He shrank away from the ancient meeting place with each one the germ of doubt, that he might play upon this destructive emotion for his own subtle purpose.

In the center of the black garbed group stood a man, unhooded. He looked about him fearfully, his rugged features now flabby and unbecomingly pale; his gnarled fingers intertwining with nervous agitation.

"But it was only a mistake," he pleaded hoarsely. "I swear that I obeyed the master, as well as I could."

A chorus of subdued, scornful laughs greeted this vain attempt at mollification. The group crashed three times within, and now came the sibilant voice of the master, through the somber tapestry walls.

"What say ye, brothers of the Black? Shall this man die according to our laws?"

thirteen uncompromising thumbs. The trembling sufferer covered his eyes with his hands, and screamed in an absolute breakdown of spirit.

"Mercy!"

Upon his knees, in the center of the cabalistic pentagram painted upon the floor of the room, he fell, his arms outstretched in mute appeal. The leader, however, recoiled back, his face a mask of horror, and a small black lacquered box.

"It is decided. Death is the punishment," cried the leader.

He extended the two objects to the subject. The man stretched forth his hand for the knife and then his flaccid fingers relaxed. He dropped to the floor. He reached for the receptacle and opened it, as his judges chuckled knowingly. Within the box was a single white tablet.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Poison—black and deadly; which way the devil will you follow? asked the master of ceremonies sternly.

"Neither," and the response was barely louder than a whisper.

The thirteen black figures about him arose from their crouching position. Now they stood with folded arms. The culprit stared about as though seeing some way to dart through the fatal circle. Yet he knew it was a hopeless thought.

"Choose!"

They spoke in unison, a grim chorus of sepulchral voices. As the white hands all pointed at him he finally weakened.

He placed the tablet within his mouth and swallowed it down. The figures drew closer now. Their heads were nearer as they watched with morbid curiosity the effect of the deadly drug. Suddenly the gone sounded once more from within, and the voice of the evil pontiff reached them.

"Send in the doomed one. I would speak with him before he dies," were his words.

The prisoner had led through the curtains; he stumbled as he walked, like a man in a trance. Within the sanctum Varney now concealed in the corner of the room, the Master awaited with a venomous smile.

"You have learned the lesson for traitors. Even a mistake means death under my rule!"

The victim gulped again and strove to speak. But no words issued from his white lips. The Master placed a black box upon the altar near him, and opening it, disclosed a number of small vials and boxes. He drew one of the vials from the case, after a careful study, uncorked it, and smelled it. Then he closed the box and turned to put it away from sight. Varney observed.

"Do you feel completely recovered, master?" he asked. "I thought you were dead last night. We worked over you for two hours or more."

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"You will not betray me?"

"No, as long as you remain faithful. But I know well that your love for Myra Maynard has made you hesitate several times when success was within your grasp. Remember, the reward I have promised you will only be paid if you earn it."

The master was silent for a few moments, lost in thought. At last he spoke.

"I am still suffering from the astral pain, due to the drag of the soul, from those accursed lights. But now I know the instrument of our complete vengeance," and the master reached to the left, crashing a brazen sun upon the Oriental song which swung close at hand.

The master of ceremonies of the Black Order entered with a slow salutation. "Has the trial begun?" demanded the master.

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"But it was only a mistake," he pleaded hoarsely. "I swear that I obeyed the master, as well as I could."

But I predict that we are just at the beginning of this new science."

"It is ridiculous," commented Mrs. Maynard. "I think that some one touched up the plates. To say that an unspoken thought can be impressed upon a piece of glass just because it is held over another person's forehead is ridiculous."

"You are right, Mrs. Maynard," chimed in Varney. "I know very little about science, I regard it all as a stupid bore—but I do know that the sun's light is necessary to make a photographic plate record anything."

"How about x-rays?" demanded Alden, impatiently. "The radiations from a Roentgen tube light pass through the plate holder, without the sun's light at all, and photograph the bones and other objects. So, with thought, which is a definite vibration of the ether, it is more delicate, yet more powerful than any artificial light or force ever generated by man's instruments. I will prove it to you."

"Try it now, then," taunted Varney. "Why not get a picture of your own face?"

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"I knew it was all nonsense. Some day, Alden, you will give up this silly business, and return to prescribing for measles and mumps," he said, as they started toward the lower floor.

Alden's face had been illuminated with a far from happy expression. Now he laughed at the sarcasm.

"Well, some day I want to do so, Varney. A physician's work is the most inspiring in the world. It is a life of sacrifice for the happiness and safety of others. Its real reward is not in the payment of bills, but in the knowledge of successful battling against death and suffering."

"Because I believe in completing one task before starting another. As a psychic practitioner I am working right now as a spiritual surgeon to remove from society a dangerous disease—a virulent cancer of criminality—so that it may threaten no more innocent lives. I am doing the best medical work, along a new line, of my whole career right now."

Varney shot a look of venom at the physician which was unobserved, as that gentleman was helping Varney with her street coat.

The trio left the house, to walk by a

the wallpaper betrayed the presence of the bullet which had grazed her so narrowly. She ran her fingers over it, with a shudder of apprehension.

Alden, followed by Varney, had dashed up the stairs. The two men peered at the doorway excitedly, on the "What was it?" demanded the physician.

She pointed to the bullet hole, and then toward the broken pane of glass. "Somebody fired at me through the window."

The physician turned quickly, and ran down the stairs, three steps at a time. He sped through the doorway to the porch. The gardener was working with a rake in one of the flower beds about twenty feet from the house.

"Did you hear that shot, my man?" demanded the doctor. "Come, now, some one tried to shoot Miss Myra."

The gardener shook his head, with an expression of incredulity.

"I heard something, sir. I thought it was the auto back-firing. That was all, sir."

"Where did the sound come from?" The physician stared keenly at the woman.

"It came down that way, sir, as I

recollect it," answered the gardener. He pointed toward the distant street, far down the driveway, with a stupid uncertainty.

"That is too far away," declared Alden. The shot sounded very near. Are you sure you didn't see anyone?"

Varney had come up behind Alden. The gardener reiterated his statement.

"I think the man is right," he declared. "The sound came from a long distance away, Dr. Alden."

The physician shook his head, and without more ado, walked down the side of the yard toward a little summer house which was the only possible place of concealment for anyone on the premises. He entered this through the doorway, which faced Myra's bedroom window. Alden observed nothing more dangerous than an old green gardener's wheelbarrow, a few potted plants, and some flower boxes. As he came out, disappointed, he observed Arthur Varney questioning the gardener sharply.

"Well, what did you learn?" asked Varney. "This man is a stupid dolt, and knows nothing, I am sure."

Alden looked fixedly at the gardener, who returned his gaze without a quiver of the heavy eyelids. Then the doctor walked back to the house, followed by Varney.

"You must not worry Mrs. Maynard; it was doubtless an accident of some sort. Just let Miss Myra be careful in the future, that is all," suggested Alden.

"Good day," and Varney for the first time assented in an opinion with his rival.

But a sharp glance of subtle warning apprised Myra that the physician was sending her a worded message of portent. The four of them took a long motor ride that afternoon, dining and driving, and then returned to Westchester. When they returned it was nearly midnight.

Myra apprehensively asked the two men to enter the house, and to remain a few minutes longer in the music room. Mrs. Maynard politely had concealed a yawning yawn, and Varney accepted the hint by rising.

"It is later than I thought; why, it is after twelve. It is time for all good people to be abed," he said, with a look at Alden, as he walked to the door.

The doctor ignored the remark, bidding him a cool good night.

After Varney's departure Myra's mother reported vainly to another visible hint, and finally excused herself with a reproachful look at Myra. But the girl pretended not to see her.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the girl. "But I don't think I shall go to bed. My mother's silk dress been quieted then Dr. Alden's turn to Myra."

"Where does he sleep, Miss Myra?" "Over the stable, in the groom's room. Our chauffeur lives at home."

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"What do you mean? Thought photography?"

"Exactly. I fortunately happen to have a plateholder with a new plate in my pocket. I am going up there and get an impression while he is asleep."

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Myra was angrily pacing the hall floor.

"This is outrageous, Dr. Alden! There is a limit to my good nature. You had no right to expose Myra to the night air at this time. And besides, she should not be out of the house now with all the danger about her."

Alden apologized, trying to mollify her.

"We were experimenting with thought photography again," said Myra, as Alden helped her remove her cloak.

"Ridiculous! You come right up to bed," said Myra.

Alden glanced at the long cheval mirror in the hallway.

"A splendid idea," he suddenly exclaimed, and impulsively he lifted it from its support, starting up the stairway with it. Myra's mother was astounded but the doctor, however, commented, advancing to the girl's room.

The moonlight was streaming through the window. Myra, at Alden's suggestion, pulled down both the black and white shades, and lit the electric lights.

"Now," said the physician, standing the mirror up at an angle from the window, and the girl stepped in her mother's room that night. Alden developed the thought photograph in the seclusion of his bedroom.

Before he went to bed. Whatever the result he seemed satisfied with his deductions.

These scientific things have done nothing but bring on more trouble. You must go home, now, doctor!"

Alden laughed indulgently.

"All right, I apologize for wearing out my welcome, but it is not self-interest. I simply insist that Miss Myra stay in the house, keep away from all windows hereafter, and that she sleep in her mother's room that night. Alden developed the thought photograph in the seclusion of his bedroom."

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dence of the tragic determination of the devil-worshippers. The big mirror was shattered by another bullet.

"Look!" cried Myra, as she stood in the shelter of the wall. "The bullet passed through the glass exactly where my head was reflected."

Alden had rushed downstairs once more. This time his action was carefully planned, in advance, for as he sped down the stairs, a policeman stepped out from the angle of the house where he had been concealed.

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